

Testimony of Hartford Mayor

Pedro E. Segarra

Committee on Planning and Development
Connecticut General Assembly

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Co-Chairs Senator Osten and Representative Rojas, Vice-Chairs Senator Cassano and Representative Fox, Ranking Members Senator Fasano and Rep. Aman, and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Raised Bill H.B. No. 5347, An Act Allowing Certain Municipalities to Create Scholarship Funds Through Municipal Bonding.

Hartford's long-term economic growth, as well as that of 24 other municipalities that the Connecticut General Assembly has identified as distressed, is impossible if the students in those cities and towns don't receive a high quality education. The more investment we make, the more likely we are to have a trained workforce prepared for the competitive job market and the more likely will the students in those cities and towns remain to fill the jobs that exist in Connecticut.

This simple, logical fact has been reaffirmed in study after study on the state's economy. It is the reason why Hartford Public Schools established the Hartford Promise scholarship and college access fund. It is the reason why members of the city's corporate and philanthropic community, such as Travelers, Hartford Hospital, the Say Yes To Education Foundation and Newman's Own Foundation have committed \$4.1 million to the fund.

And it is the reason why I am asking this committee to approve H.B. 5347, I believe that municipal governments and private industry should share the responsibility of utilizing education to drive economic development. This is the type of public/private partnership that we should promote and engage in.

The fund will award up to \$5,000 a year to every eligible Hartford resident student who attends a four-year college and \$2,500 a year to every eligible Hartford student who attends a two-year college. Moreover, it will provide the academic supports and career counseling necessary for them to stay in college and earn a degree. All of the grantees must graduate with a 3.0 grade point average in order to qualify for the scholarships.

Connecticut would not be breaking new ground by approving H.B. 5347. Since 2005, more than 30 cities, including New Haven, San Francisco, Denver, Pittsburgh and the state of Michigan have established Scholarship Funds similar to the one we have in Hartford. With very few exceptions, the funds receive government support in one form or another.

Hartford has made significant progress in closing the achievement gap and raising academic standards over the past eight years. Many of the educational reforms that we initiated were subsequently adopted by the state of Connecticut. Much more needs to be done, however.

By approving H.B. 5347, you would be bolstering those reform efforts and providing Hartford and other municipalities throughout the state with an additional weapon in the drive to foster economic health and keep local businesses competitive.

Thank you.

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